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ABSTRACT

Addressed to early childhood educators in Scotland, this guide shows how adults working in preschool and early primary school settings can maximize children's interest, knowledge, and skills in writing, and actively foster the disposition to be a writer. Following an introduction, the guide is presented in four parts. Part 1, "Teaching Writing 3-8," focuses on the role of preschool and primary school environments in promoting emergent literacy, makes suggestions for nourishing children's enthusiasm for writing, and examines the importance of a responsive curriculum for fostering interest in print and literacy. Part 2, "Print and Forming Letters," concerns what children need to learn, what they see as important, and what they understand about letter writing. This part also presents suggestions for identifying children's current level of understanding, modeling print and letter formation, and incorporating mistakes as part of the learning process. Part 3, "Writing Is Important," focuses on the importance of learning the functions of writing, the role of the family in early writing, and what educators need to know and do regarding the intentions, formats, and functions of writing. Suggestions are offered for providing writing opportunities and for supporting children as writers. Part 4, "Stories," discusses how a story telling environment enhances early writing, the characteristics of children's early stories, how adults can prompt children's stories, how they can teach children to write stories, and the role of writing as a social and personal activity. The guide includes numerous examples from practice and questions for reflection. Contains a list of 12 references and suggested readings. (KB)

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EARLY EDUCATION SUPPORT

Writing it Right?

Children Writing 3-8

PS 029236

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Writing it Right?

Children Writing 3-8

Anne Hughes and Sue Ellis

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Writing it Right? has been written to support educators in the early years. It illustrates how adults working in both pre-school and early primary school settings can maximise children's interest, knowledge and skills in writing, and actively foster the disposition to be a writer.

The document includes clear outlines of what educators need to know and practical examples of how to work with young children in developing an understanding of:

- print and forming letters
- the variety of functions of writing
- story telling and story writing.

It provides points to consider in each section and audit sheets on resources and organisation to encourage a reflective approach to current and developing practice. It helps educators address issues of continuity and progression in the early years and can be read in conjunction with the Scottish CCC publication *Learning to Write, Writing to Learn* to provide an overview of writing 3–14.

TEACHING WRITING 3–8

Poverty in an age of affluence is being unable to write and having others write about you.

Children are interested in writing and are ready to begin learning about it from an early age. There are many ways to teach writing. As long as it is interesting and relevant to the children, there is no right or wrong way.

Young children learn best when the teaching closely addresses their interests and persistent concerns. This means educators need to:

- respond to things the children are interested in and want to know about
- introduce relevant and interesting activities which prompt and explore new ideas.

Programmes of activities, where all children are expected to progress through similar tasks in the same way and at the same rate, cannot provide an effective foundation for the curriculum. All adults working with young children need a framework of understanding which underpins their observations, planning and interventions. The framework must include understanding of:

- the form of writing
- the variety of writing topics and purposes
- how children become writers, bringing form and function together.

Did you know?

It used to be thought that reading and writing should be left until children started school. Then, studies of children at home showed that pre-school children were interested in reading and writing – they saw writing as an important part of the adult world and they wanted to take part in it. Everyday activities prompted questions and comments on:

- the form of writing
- the meaning of writing
- how and why people use writing.

Children whose interest in writing was recognised and fostered did better at school. Their early knowledge of literacy formed a powerful foundation for later learning.

W. H. Teale and E. Sulzby, *Emergent Literacy: Reading and Writing*, Ablex Pub., US, 1986.
B. Tizard, T. Blatchford, J. Burke, C. Farquhar and I. Plewis, 1988, *Young Children at School in the Inner City*, Lawrence Erlbaum.

WRITING IN PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Children have different experiences of literacy and learn about different aspects of writing at different times and rates. The way that literacy is addressed by pre-school establishments will inevitably look quite different from the way it is addressed by schools, and justifiably so. What children need to know, and the way in which they learn, changes as they grow older. Pre-school establishments may also differ from schools in their:

- aims and beliefs about their purpose and mission
- external pressures and expectations
- relationships with parents
- staff backgrounds and training
- staffing ratios
- possibilities and constraints.

As a result, the writing that goes on in pre-school settings may look quite different from the writing at primary school. In pre-school settings, educators seek to provide a rich and stimulating play environment in which children have the opportunities to notice and engage in writing. **The role of the educator is to respond** to children's explorations and to support and develop their emerging understandings and skills. This responsive approach is appropriate for younger children who focus best on their own concerns and interests.

In the primary school, given the staffing ratio and curriculum expectations, **the teacher must recruit** the children to a shared agenda. The writing environment is still rich and the teaching responsive, but the children are given less choice over what, when and how they do things.

These are generalisations. There are obviously times in the pre-school when educators recruit children to a specific task or experience. Similarly, there are times in the primary classroom when the teacher responds to children's initiatives and concerns. However, the notion of a different balance between **responding** to the children writing and **recruiting** the children to writing is a useful way for educators to understand what they do.

It is important to remember that pre-school and primary school staff work towards the same end: to maximise children's interest, knowledge and skills in writing and to actively foster the disposition to be a writer.

BECOMING A WRITER

Being able to form letters and spell words is not enough; children need to be hungry to write. They must want, and be encouraged, to write for their own reasons. It is this that creates the drive to master the mechanical and compositional skills.

To develop this enthusiasm, young children need to experience a model of writing which illustrates the rich variety of topics they can write about and the different reasons for writing as well as being shown how to make the letters and words. They need to understand:

- what writing looks like
- how to make letters and symbols

- that writing is used for a whole range of purposes in real life; for thinking and communicating
- that people enjoy writing
- that writing gives status and power to the writer
- that writing lets you keep ideas for ever and tell others about them even when you haven't met.

Example from practice

Miss Markey thought about what she had been doing during the past week. She tried to find one example of each of the aspects of literacy listed above.

- **what writing looks like**
  'Laura and me have the same start to our names,' said Lorna.

  Tom was interested in the old fashioned script he saw in a story book. 'Why do they make the letters curly like that?' he asked.

  'I need a big sign that says TICKETS. How can I write it?' asked Miss Markey. She described what she was doing as she made each letter. She also explained why the word was written in capital letters and that, written in lower case, the word would look different but would still say the same thing.
  'I know that,' said Jennifer. 'My dad writes my name different from how we write it in here.'

- **how to make letters and symbols**
  Miss Markey noticed that Alan was writing the 'a' in the middle of his name as a circle and then a line, which was not always connected to the circle.
  She showed him how make an 'a' with one fluid movement.

- **that writing is used for a whole range of purposes in real life; for thinking and communicating**
  The children were having a party. Miss Markey made sure they helped her construct the list of games to play and that they consulted the list to decide the order in which the games would be played.

  She wrote down a story she had previously told the children about the adventures of her dog Scamp and showed it to them.

- **that people enjoy writing**
  Sam had written a letter to the toy shop. He was proud of what he had done and Miss Markey made sure that he had time to show it to everyone and explain why he had done it.

- **that writing gives status and power to the writer**
  The youngest children made a book which Miss Markey read to the children instead of the usual published story before they went home.

- **that writing lets you keep ideas for ever and tell others about them even when you haven't met**
  Miss Markey showed the children a book of photographs they had made some months earlier and read the captions which explained what people were saying and doing. 'I'd forgotten you used to hate gluing when you started here,' she said to Stephen.

A RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM

If children are already asking about writing or making attempts at writing, the adult needs to respond to this and extend their understanding and skills. If children appear to show no interest, the adult must ensure that opportunities arise in the course of ongoing activities which involve children in writing and drawing and make the act of writing purposeful and explicit.

This is, after all, what happens in other areas of the curriculum. If a child brings in some autumn leaves, the opportunity for learning is recognised and used: 'Let's put them on this table so that everyone can see and talk about them. Who else has noticed any leaves or nuts fallen from the trees?' When children show no interest in autumn, staff actively raise awareness by taking them on an autumn walk, to experience kicking the leaves and watching them float down. The children will be encouraged to collect leaves to explore in more detail later.

The same approach is needed to foster interest in print and literacy. Sometimes children are interested in actually forming the letters, sometimes their interest is in writing to achieve a particular end – for example to make a sign for their play or write a message to a friend – and sometimes their interest is in thinking about or remembering a particular topic.

The curriculum cannot be wholly confined to a programme of activities designed to fit into one 'slot' during the day. The adult needs to be ready to identify the focus of, and develop, existing interests and to prompt new ones whenever opportunities occur.

Example from practice

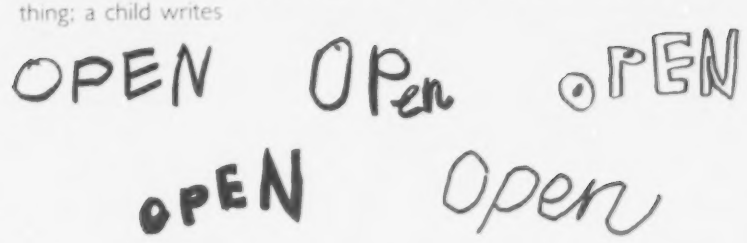
Responding to children's interests
Amita arrived with a postcard to show the children. 'My gran sent me this from her holiday. Look my name is on it,' she said. The adult talked with the children about the picture on the front, the message, the address, the stamp, why people send postcards and how you feel when you get one.

Prompting an interest
Shane's mum had a new baby. The adult suggested that the children write cards, jokes, helpful hints and congratulatory messages to the family and to the new baby. The children chose what they wrote and who they wrote to. Some children worked alone, others worked in pairs or groups. They talked with each other and the adult about why and how they were writing.

Did you know?

Children who choose to spend time writing may have different motivations. Their writing may be:

- **exploratory** – they may try out different ways to write the same thing; a child writes



  to try to make a shop sign look more realistic
- **imitative** – they may be sparked off by an example of writing seen at home, on television or something that has been modelled by the educator or another child
- **practice** – they may be trying to improve a particular format
- **mastery** – they may be writing to show 'I can do it'.

Points to consider

- Children have different early experiences of writing. How can you investigate the early experiences of the children with whom you work?
- Do the children with whom you work ever ask questions about print or write unprompted by an adult? How could you encourage this?
- Do you use children's questions, comments or actions showing an interest in writing as a starting point for work with individuals or groups?
- Do you encourage children to share and explain their questions and the answers they found with other children in their group?
- Do you talk to parents about the interests and curiosity children show at home?
- Do you talk to children about your writing in the course of everyday activities?
- Do you foster an interest in writing? Do you notice when children do something interesting? Do you plan experiences and opportunities to raise awareness or make explicit particular aspects of writing?

PRINT AND FORMING LETTERS

The three issues about letter formation that most worry educators of young children are:

- what to teach young children about forming letters
- when to start teaching them about letter formation
- how to go about teaching letter formation.

PRINT, LETTERS AND FORM: WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO LEARN

Children need to know that there is a standardised way of writing words. The following aspects need to be made visible and explicit to all children:

- what letters look like
- how to form the letters
- the relationship between letter symbols and sounds
- how letters are grouped together to form words.

Children will learn about these over time and through a wide variety of activities and experiences. What is learnt most quickly and easily will vary and may depend on individual differences between children.

Problems may arise if the quest for perfect letter formation becomes a barrier to children understanding the other aspects of writing: the pleasure that writing can give to writer and reader; the power it has to influence actions; the composition skills and knowledge required for writing for different purposes, etc. In short, how writing is used in the adult world.

PRINT AND FORM: WHAT CHILDREN SEE AS IMPORTANT

Adults tend to see words and letters in a neutral way. But to children the letters and words of their own names or the names of family members, for example, are not only more familiar but also very much more powerful and interesting than any others.

Adults need to recognise this and use these personally important words and letters as a springboard for learning about other words and letters. They can encourage children to personalise their knowledge, motivate further interest and notice similarities, differences and details in the form, formation, sounds and sequence of letters in words.

Example from practice

What children write and say shows how some words are more important to them than others.

Daniella Delissandri was obviously fascinated by all the 'D's in her name – she wrote a whole page of 'D's and took pleasure telling her friends about them. Some of her friends also had the letter 'D' in their names.

Miss Namyslak noticed this. She had been told to teach the sounds and forms of all the letters in the alphabet and had planned to start with the letter 'A', since this was the beginning.

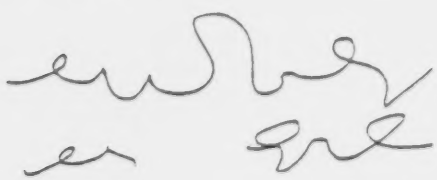
Instead, she decided to start with the letter 'D'. Each child was encouraged to find a person or a toy with a D in its name; they found the letter on the 'Alphabet frieze' and made pictures and letters to stick around it. When there were too many for the wall space, bits of string 'mapped' the pictures onto the correct letter.

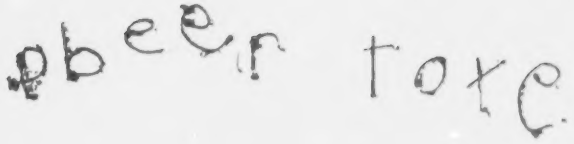
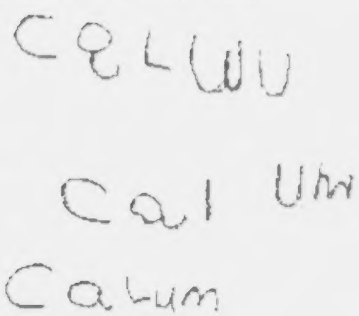
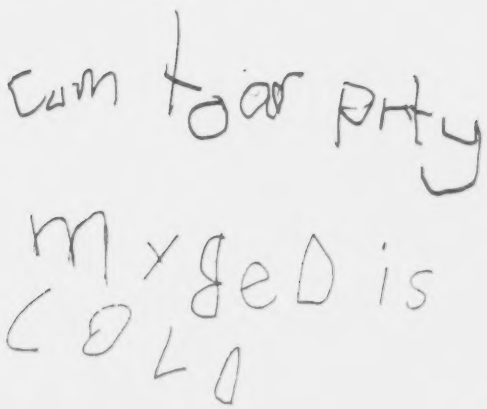
Then she made a class 'letter dip'. Each child wrote their favourite letter, or put a drawing or toy associated with their favourite letter, in a special box. An item drawn from the box determined which letter should be studied next. All the children who had chosen this letter talked about why; then everyone did collections, examples, stories and games associated with it.

SCRIBBLES AND MARK MAKING: WHAT THE CHILDREN KNOW, UNDERSTAND AND CAN DO

Some children begin writing by copying what they see adults doing. This 'scribble writing' can start quite young – age 3 – and continue in play situations until the child is well into primary 2.

The features that children include in their scribble writing show what they have noticed and understood about the features of print. There is a rough pattern of development, although not all children follow this, and some children never scribble write.

Example of the writing	**What this might indicate about the child's understanding of form**
Scribble streams	The child is aware that people write and that writing looks different from drawings
Scribble script 	The child is becoming aware of what writing looks like; that there are gaps and different shapes

Example of the writing	What this might indicate about the child's understanding of form
Separate marks – may be letter-like	The child is beginning to realise that writing is made up of individual symbols
Word-like clusters 	The child knows that words are groups of symbols and knows what some of these symbols look like
Experiment with own name 	The child has begun to recognise that the letters in a sequence represent important words. The child may or may not have sound-symbol correspondence but is likely to begin learning this through talk when he writes his name
Write to convey a message 	The child can remember what letters look like, has sound-letter correspondence, but doesn't always 'hear' the vowels in words
	The child can remember letters and use knowledge of sound-letter correspondence to write something. This child can either hear all the sounds (including the vowel in the middle of 'bed') or has remembered the letter

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The young child who is scribbling

Adults need to take an interest in what children do and why. They need to talk to the children about writing and encourage them to notice new features. The starting point for this is often discussion of a word that is important to the child – their own name, mummy or other important family names, their favourite toy, breakfast cereal or TV programme title.

The adult can point out the individual letters, their order, orientation and the letter-sound correspondence. From this starting point, children should be encouraged to recognise these letters and how the letter looks when written in capitals or lower case.

The children should see the adult forming these letters, and hear the adult talking about how and what they are doing: 'This is how I make your "r".'

They can be encouraged to notice when letters which feature in their personally important words crop up elsewhere.

The older child who produces correct letters in set tasks, but scribbles at home or in play

Children who may be quite capable writers in class often revert to scribble writing when they are playing and know that others don't have to read it. The action of writing is what is important, rather than what is being written.

This is interesting because it shows that children who often don't appear to be having any difficulties in set tasks may not be confident to use writing independently, may find the physical demands too onerous or may find that it is just not quick enough to get their ideas down.

As children become more confident in their knowledge and skills, and more comfortable and adept at the physical demands of writing, the scribbling usually ceases.

The child who doesn't scribble write

Sometimes children do not scribble write. This may be because:

- they know a lot about writing and do not find it satisfying to produce anything that doesn't resemble the adult form
- they are not interested in, or see no point in, writing.

The adult needs to know which children do not scribble write, and why.

PRINT AND FORM: START WITH THE CHILD

To find a starting point for planning work with any young child, the adult has to notice what the child knows and cares about.

The following activity can help adults think about what they really know about the children and what they need to find out.

Take a list of the children in your care. For each child, try to answer the following questions:

- Do they know the difference between words, letters and logos?
- Do they scribble write? What does this show about their understanding of letter formation?
- Do they always write left to right?
- Do they write any letters or words? If so, which are they? Why are these letters so important?
- Can they copy letters or words? Can they copy over; copy from paper in front of them; copy from the walls?
- How do they hold a pencil? Do they always hold it the same way? In the same hand?
- Which letters can they recognise reliably? Can they recognise the first letter of their name?
- Which letters can they sound? Do they know that the letters in their name make the sounds in their name?
- Can they find the words or letters they need and use them, or do they always expect an adult to provide them?

This exercise may prompt staff discussion of how well the current learning programme addresses the needs of each child.

Pre-school settings and the early stages of primary schools may address these issues in different ways. However, it is important that the issues are addressed and that the curriculum meets the children's needs to ensure that they make progress in both skills and understanding of print, and that this is monitored.

MODEL PRINT AND LETTER FORMATION

A good literacy environment provides models of writing which the children are encouraged to notice, talk about and copy. It enables the children to be less dependent on adults being available to write for them; they know what is available and how to use it to support their writing.

Children need two kinds of models.

- **Models in action**: adults and other children talking about lower case and capital letters, explaining the sounds, and showing how to form the letters. This sort of modelling may be prompted by shared writing opportunities and resources (in play, routines or directed time) but also by resources such as plastic letters, typewriters, computer programs and alphabet charts.
- **Static models** of letters and writing: in books, on the walls, tables, play and work equipment, etc. It is important the children know what these say and know how to use them.

Example from practice

Mrs Bracegirdle thought about the modelling of print and letter formation that had taken place during the morning session. She remembered:

- adults talking as they make the letters – 'This one's easy. It starts right at the top and goes straight down. Then you dot it; I mustn't forget to do the dot.'
- print and labels in the environment which have been created or discussed with the children – 'Let's put the wool in this drawer. We'd better make a label to show where it is.'
- magnetic letters, alphabet charts and other aids to generate talk and exploration of letters – 'Look I've made your name,' Lisa said to Callum. 'No you haven't, that last one is an *m* not an *n*,' he said.

SHOW CHILDREN HOW TO FIND OUT

The point about providing a strong and richly modelled literacy environment is that the children begin to develop an awareness and strong visual memory for letters and print. It is this which enables them to notice when things are incorrect.

Often children need supports for their own checking mechanisms to work. They may need to be shown how to:

- check the letter or word against other labels, captions or wordbanks
- work with a friend to spot similarities, differences and errors.

Did you know?

When two people are working together and one explains something to the other, the person who benefits most is the explainer. Having to sort out ideas and put them into words to explain to someone else helps to clarify understanding.

MISTAKES ARE PART OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

When children are learning to walk or to push the trolley in the supermarket we do not expect them to get it right at first. Adults know they will have to encourage and praise children's efforts, provide explicit guidance and give support throughout the learning period. They also know that, unless children are given the freedom and encouraged to try doing things unaided, they will not learn to do them independently.

It is the same with early writing. Children need to explore print and to practise what they are learning. The adult must accept that they will make all kinds of 'mistakes':

- getting the letters round the wrong way
- inconsistencies in how the letters are formed

- using capital letters or mixing capitals and lower case
- muddling the order of letters and words.

The errors children make show what they have understood and mastered and what they have not. When children make errors, particularly if they make consistent errors, this provides another perfect opportunity for helpful discussion, between an adult and a child or between two children, about what to look for and what to do.

The adult may:

- talk to the child about their writing and how they have done it
- point the error out and explain
- help the child to identify the error
- remind the child how to do the writing correctly
- remind the child to check.

It is also important to recognise what children do know, as well as the 'errors' they make.

Example from practice

Miss Steele thought about what some of the children in her class knew, as well as the errors they made. She made these observations.

Although **Shane** was always getting the letter 's' round the wrong way, he knew it looked like a big curly snake. Part of the problem was that he always wanted to move his hand in a left-to-right direction.

Although **Donna** demonstrated a huge range of inconsistencies in how the letter 'a' was formed, she always made the final product look approximately right. Her visual image was correct and this could be used to help her build a correct and strong letter formation.

Although **Misha** wrote using capital letters or sometimes mixed capitals and lower case letters, his parents had obviously taken the trouble to show him how to write a whole range of letters and words. He had demonstrated considerable motivation in mastering the pencil control and visual skills. He needed, and was ready, to learn when capitals and lower case letters were appropriate.

Points to consider

- Are there examples of a variety of types of print?
- Are words that are important to the children displayed or provided?
- Are there a variety of resources – different kinds of paper and tools for writing?
- Do you:
  - model writing and talk about it?
  - encourage children to talk about the writing they have produced and how they did it?

- Do the children:
  - talk about letters and words when using plastic letters, typewriters, computer programs and alphabet charts?
  - know where to find paper and pencils and talk about letters and words as they use them?
- How can you adapt what you do to capitalise on the children's current concerns?

WRITING IS IMPORTANT

Early writing experiences teach children about the **form** writing takes and about the **function** of writing.

What children know about the form of writing is often obvious – their understanding is reflected in what they do – be it writing words, letters or scribble writing.

What children know about the function of writing may be less obvious, but is just as crucial to their development as writers:

- if children see the point of writing, they learn to master the form more quickly
- children need to recognise the different writing formats – cards, forms, lists, posters, etc. – and know the functions each can serve
- children need to know that sometimes adults use writing to communicate, but also to help them think, plan or remember.

To understand the functions of writing, children have to write. From the very beginning, they must write for themselves and for their own purposes. If this doesn't happen and children are totally dependent on copy-writing and adults scribing, they see writing as a task they do for adults and don't understand that they write for their own benefit.

Early understandings of the functions of writing may be personal and localised; writing is often a means to an end. Thus, a child tries to write 'VICTORIA'S – KEEP OFF' to stop younger siblings breaking a LEGO model. Educators of young children need to build from these personal writing events to:

- broaden the range of functions for which children use writing
- deepen children's understanding of the language and the formats associated with these functions.

WRITING IS USEFUL

Young children see writing all around them:

- at home
- in the streets
- in shops and buildings.

They see adults using writing to:

- get information
- give information
- obtain things they need
- help their lives work smoothly
- send and receive social messages
- think and learn.

Young children know that writing is important and powerful; it can tell people what to do and stop them from doing things. Writing gives important information: the time of a television programme; which bus to catch; where to find items in a shop; and which breakfast cereal has a toy inside. Writing also reminds a busy parent to buy a favourite food, or when and where the party is being held.

Writing also does things for the writer: it helps keep in touch with friends and relatives; it helps get access to money or goods in shops; it helps plan what is needed for a party or holiday; and it lets the writer state opinions and preferences.

Educators also need to recognise how writing contributes to the learning process. Writing helps children to recognise what they know and what they have learned; it prompts them to refine their thoughts and can highlight what they do not quite understand.

UNDERSTANDING BEGINS AT HOME

Educators sometimes wish that parents would leave the teaching of writing to them. In the past, primary teachers have expressed concern when children come to school writing in capital letters, combining scribble writing with letters or making letters the wrong way round.

Yet, even when young children write with mistakes, they have learned about the formats for writing postcards, posters, lists, signs, letters and invitations, and they know how these differ. They have also learned the difference between writing and drawing and they know why writing is useful. They have absorbed some of the power and satisfaction of writing.

This has to be a significant advantage in becoming literate.

Did you know?

Research shows that all children – even those from 'low literacy' homes – learn about writing at home. Although the range may vary, some writing materials are available to children in all families.

At home, children learn about the power of writing from watching adults and other children, and from reading. They also learn from writing themselves. From an early age, children will have engaged in writing, or trying to write:

- birthday cards
- letters
- lists for shopping, parties, holiday packing
- invitations and thank you notes
- names and signs for their bedroom door.

They will also have played at writing:

- filling in the forms at the bank or post office
- making signs for playing shops
- noting down messages from the telephone
- making signs to show directions and where things are.

J. Weinberger, 1996, *Literacy Goes to School*, Paul Chapman

Points to consider

- What do you know about the writing materials and experiences children have at home? How could you find out?
- How could you work with parents to promote writing at home – through materials, encouragement, talking about writing, and writing that children and parents can do together?
- Do you encourage children to use their home knowledge of writing in play and work experiences? Which resources and events could prompt this?

WHAT EDUCATORS NEED TO KNOW

An adult may make a shopping list for different reasons:

- to tell someone else what to buy
- to think about what items are needed
- to organise the shopping and ensure that nothing is missed.

Sometimes writing is used to communicate with others, but often people write for themselves. Children need to have the different intentions of the writer pointed out.

Educators need to ensure that children notice and understand that writing can help adults to organise thoughts and actions as well as communicate with others.

Did you know?

Educators tend to think about writing in terms of the writing formats and the activities which prompt them. In their planning they talk about children writing letters, recipes, signs, posters and 'topic' writing.

However, to ensure breadth of coverage and use the activities effectively, adults working with children need to know that writing may have:

- **different intentions** – it may be to communicate with others, to explore your own thinking or to organise your actions
- **different formats** (posters, letters, lists, speeches, diaries, reports, etc.), each of which has typical layout and design features
- **different functions** (to persuade, report, recount, explain, discuss or argue) – the function often determines the language and organisation that is used.

WHAT EDUCATORS NEED TO DO

Children learn when adults:

- treat them as writers, with their own things to say and reasons to write
- foster an enthusiasm and interest in writing
- provide and promote opportunities for them to write
- talk to them about their writing and drawings
- provide a model of what it is to be a writer and of writing for different purposes
- make opportunities for the children to talk about writing – their own and other people's.

Examples from practice

Foster opportunities to write

The children were playing outside with bikes and cars. There were lots of arguments about who could go where. Sometimes there were crashes. The adult provided card and writing materials for the children to make road signs. They made signs for directions, no-entry, parking spaces, one-way, stop and go, no pedestrians, passing places, children crossing.

Show that writing gets results

The children really enjoyed the soup they were given for dinner. They wished they could have it more often. The educator suggested that they tell the cook, but the cook had gone home. She suggested that the children could write a letter to tell the cook how much they liked the soup and to ask if they could have it more often.

Model being a writer

In one school, at the end of each week, the teacher chose the three best things that had happened in the class that week and wrote them in a class 'big book'. These highlights were read and shared regularly. Children and parents were encouraged to contribute if they wished.

The educator in a nursery showed the children the letters she had written and received about the arrangements for a trip to the aquarium.

Treat children as writers

The educator made a special area where children could pin up writing and drawing they had done. She made an effort to talk to each child about what they had contributed and why. She also encouraged children to notice new items and talk to one another about them. Sometimes she took opportunities to talk with all the children about the writing and drawing display.

Points to consider

- What opportunities do your children have for writing?
- Do your children notice adults using writing to think, plan or remember things? What could you do to highlight this in the course of daily activities?
- Do the writing activities and experiences you provide enable children to communicate for a variety of purposes? Which are most frequent?
- How would you find out what your children understand about what writing is for?
- How could you support your children being writers?

PROVIDE REAL OPPORTUNITIES TO WRITE

Children need real, not contrived, opportunities to write during the course of a day. They may write for play, for planned experiences and tasks, or as part of the daily organisation and routines, but they should be writing for purposes that are real in life, and real in play:

- to obtain items and information that they need
- to help their lives work smoothly
- to send and receive messages.

Purposeful writing can happen in particular areas of the nursery or primary classroom or as a result of particular routines. Educators should be aware when children choose writing activities so that they can model, support or talk about them afterwards with the children.

Educators need to consider the potential of the routines, different play and work areas as well as the adult-initiated activities in planning for a high-literacy environment.

How might writing happen: routines and organisation

There are many (often unexploited) opportunities for children to write for real purposes in the course of their lives in school or pre-school.

Routines	Examples	Does this happen? Could it happen? Could I model it with the children?
access to, and keeping track of, resources	signing for books, snack, scissors, etc.	
organising and recording for activities	recording choices and what they did; booking a slot for an activity	
organising duties and rotas	charts to show who will water the plants, choose the story, feed the fish, be the messenger, etc.	
sorting out lunches	recording packed lunch and school lunch people; making signs to show what children could choose	
labelling creations	writing a name or a title for what they have made	
settling/together time	signing in; putting on name badges; making badges or welcome cards for new children	
sharing messages	sharing/sending letters, cards and postcards when appropriate; writing signs for special occasions; writing messages for others in the class	

How might writing happen: resourcing areas

Educators need to consider how children can be encouraged to use writing in the course of their work and play. Often this can be encouraged by providing appropriate resources and a watchful adult on hand to respond, notice, support and talk about what the children want to say.

Areas need to be resourced for writing, but children also need time and space to write for their own purposes. They also need to learn how to access the materials, know what they can be used for and how to use them. An ethos which encourages children to explain their intentions and difficulties allows adults to suggest other resources or ways to achieve what they want.

Children need opportunities to decide for themselves that writing is necessary. They should feel free to use it in the course of their everyday play. However, systems are needed to ensure that what children do is noticed and supported. Adults need this information to plan future learning and use what some children do as a model for others.

Area	**Examples: What the children may do and resources which may prompt them**	**Does this happen where I work? Do I need to think about improving the talk, resources, time, experience?**
home corner (or café, shop, vet's, garden centre, clinic, hospital, etc.)	phone messages on pad; lists; telephone numbers; diary; notes; bills; typewriter; letters; invitations; cards; house name/number; or order books, prescriptions, price tags, etc. for other contexts	
construction	labels for area, name, titles of constructions, where things go, to show others not to touch; drawings/instructions to show how to make things or reconstruct them	
art/creative area	labels for area, resource boxes, titles, names; titles for display board	

Area	Examples: What the children may do and resources which may prompt them	Does this happen where I work? Do I need to think about improving the talk, resources, time, experience?
outdoor area/ physical area	signs to highlight safe use of equipment, where it is kept; signs which inform/warn others about how the children want the area used: 'Please don't cut – we've planted flowers' or 'Dig here for worms'	
book corner	ways to indicate favourite books or recommend books; reviews; opportunities to draw, trace and write about characters	
writing area	different types of paper, writing tools; typewriter; computer; examples of types of script and letters; paper folded into 'books' (e.g. concertina books; big books); cards; envelopes; post-it paper; tiny home-made notebooks to take away; staplers; paper-punch; access to materials to embellish their work	
baking area	shopping lists; recipes; checking the contents of cupboards against a list; signs to show where produce is kept; signs for tasting sessions and what people said about the food	

Example from practice

Mrs Patel used the audit sheets to think about the possibilities to build more writing into her routines and areas. She noted that the children rarely wrote for real reasons. Few of the children were independent writers, and she felt that some had developed an attitude of 'learned helplessness' in which they always expected the teacher to provide words to copy. She was keen to encourage her children to see writing in a more purposeful light.

She decided to stop making all the signs and labels for the display of the children's work. As children finished their creations, she asked them whether they wanted to display their work. If they did, she gave them paper or card and pens and asked them to make a sign to go with their work.

It was informative to see what children did to help themselves write. She noted which children did scribble writing, which asked another child to help and which children used signs that they had remembered or signs that were already up to help them write.

Some children seemed confused about how to start or what to do and Mrs Patel used a variety of strategies. She:

- suggested that these children ask a friend to help
- talked to them about what they would like to write
- helped them to see which bits they could write themselves using the print on the walls and in books, and the sounds and letters they already knew
- encouraged them to have a go using the copy and checking strategies they already had.

Not everyone has room for permanent areas like those listed above. However, children can have similar experiences as long as resources are provided and children know that they can use them. These can be bags of props for imaginative play and writing; shoe boxes of writing materials; a briefcase with paper, office and writing materials; a box with book-making equipment or trays with paper, pens, pencils, collage materials and glue.

How might writing happen: child-initiated writing

Child-initiated activities are important because:

- children are using writing and drawing for their own purposes, as a means to an end or to tell or demonstrate their knowledge and competence to other children
- they can spark literacy spirals
- they show what children know and can do and how they apply their knowledge
- they can allow children to revisit and explore aspects of writing
- they enable children to practise at their own pace.

By observing children in self-initiated writing, adults can learn about:

- children's interests and persistent concerns
- what children understand or misunderstand
- what is challenging to children
- what is exciting for children
- what children can do
- what children are confident about
- what can be usefully drawn to the attention of others.

Adults must recognise both *why* the children are writing and *what* they are writing in order to help children:

- do what they want to do
- use writing to fulfil the function they envisage.

They also need to notice what children are doing so that they can:

- talk about specific aspects of writing when they know these will be of interest and use to the child
- recognise the gaps – notice what the child is not doing and needs to be shown.

Examples from practice

- In the home area Karim (3 years 2 months) answered the telephone and wrote down a message on the notepad.

  Karim was imitating what he had seen at home. The adult later said 'Who phoned and what did they say?' in order to explore how far he understood that the writing was to help remember a message.

- Joey, Karen and Amy made a bus from blocks. 'Now we need a sign to show where it's going,' said Amy. The adult provided material. Joey wanted just to draw a picture but Karen insisted that there must be a number and Amy said there should be some words as well. The adult 'wondered aloud' to prompt the children to explain what bus signs are for and how they are used.

  Amy knew that buses have signs and what is on them. She also knew what this information was used for. The adult contribution ensured that her knowledge was used to develop the other children's understanding.

- Lara (5 years 4 months) drew a picture of her holiday but Sumilla could not understand who and what it was about. Lara was cross with Sumilla. The adult explained to Lara that no-one could 'read' such specific information from a picture. She offered to write it so that Sumilla and everyone else could read the words and know what the picture was about. Lara dictated: 'Me and my wee brother are laughing at the dog but my dad is cross.'

  Lara did not understand that writing can be much more explicit than drawing. Sumilla wasn't able to explain this either. The adult explained this to both of them and showed them how to do it. A child with a fuller understanding might have recognised the need for writing and asked the adult for help. 'Help me write the names and things so that Sumilla knows about my holiday.'

- Rupa (6 years) made a notice for the display board. It said
  'RAINBOW PENCIL LOST – TELL RUPA IF YOU FIND IT'

  Rupa was using writing for her own, very important, purpose. She knew that through writing she could communicate with others and ask for help. She was confident in the power of writing and in herself as a writer.

- 'Look, I can write the names of everyone in my family – even my dog,' said Archie (4 years 2 months). 'That's brilliant,' said the educator. 'Who showed you how to do that?' 'I just knowed it,' said Archie. The educator made a point of showing Archie's mother his brilliant writing. The mother said he was always nagging people – his sister, dad and herself – to show him how to write things but she wasn't sure if this was what she should do. 'It's great – he's really interested and it's taught him loads about writing,' said the educator.

  Archie was proud to display his knowledge and skills. The educator's response celebrated this. She also used his work to find out more about, and encourage, his home literacy experiences.

- The children in one class were given a writing wall, on which they could display anything they liked. One day this notice went up:

  If you want to know about SPACE ask CALLUM.
  If you want to know about DINOSAURS ask ROSIE.
  If you want to know about PIRATES ask TOM.

  The children were using writing to display and celebrate what they know and who they are. The writing showed their confidence but also their ownership of their writing.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AS WRITERS

An exciting environment for writing, which provides resources and opportunities to write, may spark children's interest. However, children need focused support to remain enthusiastic and develop their understanding.

Adults working with young children seek to use what the children already know and can do, and then to extend it. This requires the adult to know:

- what writing and learning to write involves
- how young children learn.

A key aim of educators is to introduce children to a wider range of purposes for writing, a variety of formats and ways of communicating their messages. If this is to be achieved, not all writing activities can be initiated by the children. These elements are so important that the educator has to make sure that every child has noticed them and has an opportunity to explore them further.

Sometimes educators interpret this as providing many examples of different kinds of writing for children to copy. However, the children often fail to understand the function of the writing; they focus on copying the letters and words. Children who only copy-write will be very slow to understand the variety of writing functions and formats and will find it difficult to compose their own writing.

Revisit experiences and revise understandings

Young children need lots of opportunities to explore ideas and develop skills. Sometimes they need to revisit the same experiences and activities; sometimes they need to explore lots of different but related examples. They go through a cycle of re-visiting and re-revising, gradually adding new elements, so that they are both deepening and broadening their understanding.

Examples from practice

Revisit the same experiences and activities

- 'I've tidied the shoes and now I'm going to write where everything goes,' explained Peter. The educator complimented Peter and pointed out what he had done to the other children. She asked if there was anything else that needed to be sorted and labelled. Peter and a group of friends worked on these.
- Carole said to Eilidh 'I'm going to put up a notice to say NO MORE SPLASHING in the water area.' The children were encouraged to identify other rules that would help play to be more enjoyable and to make signs for these.
- Card making is a common activity which occurs regularly and for a range of celebrations. Rather than producing identical cards, the educator asked children what they wanted to say each time they made a card. For Mother's Day Sam wrote 'I like it when you tickle me, mummy'; for Easter he wrote 'You can share my eggs'; for Diwali he wrote 'I've made you a shiny picture.'
- Rajiv found a sticky label with his name in the nursery name book. 'Can I put my model in a special place and will you put this beside it to show that I made it?' he asked. As the year progressed, he labelled his work and wrote his name each time.
- The children kept photograph albums of things they did. They regularly wrote captions and speech bubbles to explain the photos for visitors.

Exploring different but related examples

- Each time the children celebrated a special event, they were engaged in different kinds of writing: making posters, banners, signs, invitations, cards, menus, photo captions.
- Topics generated different but related types of writing. For a topic on babies, children wrote 'handy hints' lists, cards, 'QUIET – BABY SLEEPING' signs, toy catalogues. For the garden centre topic, children wrote signs, labels, catalogues, instructions for plants and seeds, lists of personal favourites and recommendations.

Create and use literacy spirals

Once children find a writing experience enjoyable and interesting, their enthusiasm is infectious. One small literacy event which sparks their imagination can spiral and draw everyone in. When everyone is talking about it and trying it out, a spiral has definitely started.

Educators need to recognise when these spirals are happening and build on them. When the children have tried writing once and enjoyed it, they should be able to repeat the activity and to try other things. Unless they get the opportunity for this, the spiral will collapse.

Educators need therefore to:

- be willing to spark spirals and know how these contribute to the curriculum
- know the resources, the activities, the adult attitudes and the children's enthusiasms which can spark off a spiral
- support the spirals so that they grow.

Example from practice

The book *The Jolly Postman* by Alan and Janet Ahlberg acted as the initial spark. Writing paper and envelopes were put into the writing area and the children were enthusiastic about writing letters and notes, making stamps and licking the envelopes.

At the end of the morning, there was a huge pile of letters on the table. Some children hadn't written on the envelope who the letter was for. Others had made elaborate addresses and stamps.

The next day, a post-box was provided. The children were excited; they spontaneously explained the importance of writing names on the front of the envelopes and took more care to do this. They also took more care about the message and drawings they were sending.

Because of the large quantity of mail, a regular daily delivery was needed. The children decided that just before lunch would be a good time. The educator thought so too since it meant that all children could be included in this literacy activity and so the spiral grew.

Adapted from: B. Reynolds, 1997, *Literacy in the Pre-School*, Trentham Books

Model the thinking, the process and the language

Educators need to make explicit to children the knowledge that writers have and the decisions that they make. For this adults need to:

- model writing in action, explaining what the writer thinks about when writing
- provide models of writing to explore, copy and discuss with children.

Examples from practice

Modelling writing in action

The educator had to write a letter to the children's parents inviting them to an open evening. She explained this to the children and asked them for suggestions about what to say. She composed the letter on a poster-sized sheet of paper, working with the children's suggestions. By encouraging them to consider the different ways of saying things, she pointed out what

the reader needed to know, what might need re-phrasing for the reader to understand, and how to make the letter inviting for parents.

She took the final draft away and got the letter typed. The children took it home that evening.

Models of writing to explore, copy and discuss

The children were doing a topic on shoes and shoe shopping. The adult provided a range of catalogues and explained that catalogues were written to sell shoes. She talked to the children about how and why the catalogues were used, what information people needed about the shoes, and how this was presented persuasively.

Friends selected what they thought would be a good range of shoes to include in their catalogue. They drew, photocopied, photographed or cut out pictures of shoes and talked about what made them desirable. They wrote about this, set prices and read each other's work.

Finally, they decided how to organise and present the shoes in a catalogue format. In play, other children used the catalogue to choose shoes.

Is it working?

Do the children:

- write spontaneously for their own purposes
- enjoy writing on their own and with others
- talk readily and enthusiastically about their own writing and other people's
- ask questions about writing
- want to do writing activities
- groan when they have to stop writing
- write at home
- talk to their parents about writing?

If so, you have created a community of budding writers.

STORIES

Children enjoy stories. They read them, watch them, play them, draw them, listen to them, tell them and talk about them. They do this with friends, adults and alone.

Stories are a good starting point for learning. The interest and motivation are already there, as is a strong base of experience about what a story is and what story telling involves.

Did you know?

> The number of pre-school story experiences a child has is one of the strongest predictors of achievement in school.
>
> Why are stories so powerful for learning? The language of stories is rich and varied. In stories, children encounter and explore the structures, rhythms and rhymes of language.
>
> In listening to stories children picture and discuss real and imaginary worlds. This helps them to understand things that happen in their own lives, to explore problems, alternatives and solutions. It takes them beyond their own contexts into situations and places outside their own direct experience. Through this, they develop richer mental models of the world and they learn how to use language to talk about them.
>
> G. Wells, 1987, *The Meaning Makers*, Hodder & Stoughton

GETTING STARTED: WHAT ARE STORIES AND WHERE DO THEY HAPPEN?

The first thing children need is a rich story-telling environment where stories are read, told and enjoyed.

When children talk about or create and re-create stories through drawings, models, or through play with dressing-up clothes, play-people or other props, they talk about the essential elements of story:

- who is in the story and what they are like
- the places and settings in which the story evolves
- the problems the characters encounter and what happens.

Adults who work with young children need to encourage story telling, playing and writing. Through creating and telling stories, children develop attitudes and expertise that form a basis for later written stories. Educators should seek to:

- broaden the children's range of stories, settings or characters
- deepen the children's understanding of what stories are and of the key elements of character, setting and plot

- help children recognise how their stories are created and developed
- develop the children's understanding of the craft of story telling, understanding what the listener needs to know and how to hold the listener's attention
- help children to appreciate the benefits of writing stories down.

One way to start is to identify where the potential for stories occurs in your setting and to recognise the value of this. Where are children already creating stories? Where are they telling stories? What kind of stories do they create? How can this potential be used to contribute to an ethos which celebrates and values stories so that children want them to be captured in writing and enjoyed forever?

What kinds of stories do the children create?

Observe the children in a variety of situations in which stories are created. Begin to note the kinds of stories that each child creates to build a picture of that child's story experience and motivations. For example:

- children may play or draw the same story repeatedly, adding more detail to the character or a wider range of behaviours that their character uses
- they may create variations on the same type of story – over a number of days one group of children created a sea world around the climbing frame; they played various versions of rescues at sea, the characters, the problem and the resolution was slightly different each time
- they may replay stories which they have seen on television or in books, using the known story structure or characters to scaffold their actions
- they may create a variety of types of stories.

Example from practice

Where do stories happen?

Mrs Arnold used the audit sheet shown on the next page to note where the children were telling and inventing stories. She was surprised at the number and range of story experiences. Once she began to notice them, she immediately saw their potential when harnessed to the curriculum.

Possible play experiences	Observational notes
Imaginative areas home corner/café/hairdresser's/ the Three Bears' cottage/ spaceship/hospital/garden centre/ fantasy castle/travel agency/ toyshop/bookshop/post office...	
Construction materials large bricks/small bricks/ LEGO/DUPLO/Mobilo	
'Small world' toys zoo/farm/play people/ floor mats/garage/house/ dinosaurs...	
Creative activities painting/collage/model making/ drawings/Plasticine pictures	
Baking/cooking planning a party/ Teddy Bears' picnic...	
Display tables shells/'our favourite toys'/ shiny things/jewellery...	
Puppets flannelgraphs to create stories/background pictures	

Sue Ellis, Anne Hughes and Lynda Keith, 1996, *Scholastic Writing Workshop: Imaginative Writing, Key Stage 1: Crafting Stories*, Scholastic Ltd, p. 143

BECOMING A STORY TELLER

Children should be encouraged to share their stories by telling them to one another and discussing the stories they have been told. This can happen informally as children talk to one another as they play and create stories. It also happens when the educator notices and appreciates the stories children have to tell. Educators still, however, need to provide a forum for children to tell their stories to others in more structured settings – at group feedback times, for example. Through telling stories, children:

- understand the task of the narrator – young children must learn the difference between telling a story for their own pleasure and satisfaction and telling the story

for the pleasure of others; it can take some time for them to develop a concept of themselves as a narrator, rather than a story participant
- understand that the listener does not always share the knowledge of the story teller
- learn what the listener needs to know
- learn the conventional ways of helping the listener understand – by setting the scene; by introducing, describing and naming the characters; by clearly signalling the problematic elements; by using clear and explicit language
- learn how to maintain the listener's interest by focusing the story, posing questions, creating cliff-hangers and altering the pace.

Example from practice

Mrs Memuir encouraged children to ask questions of the story teller. She modelled this by asking questions of stories she read to the children: 'I wondered why Goldilock's mother hadn't told her not to go into strange houses. What did you wonder about?' She also encouraged the children to wonder about their own stories as they were shared in the group. She encouraged phrases such as 'tell me more about...' and 'I wonder...' and 'I liked the bit where...'. She discouraged vague judgemental phrases such as 'It was a good/bad story.'

Prompting stories to happen

Adults can prompt stories by providing:

- space and resources
- enjoyable opportunities for the children to tell stories, experience stories and re-tell them
- time
- modelling – authors/story tellers
- an interest in the children's stories and an ethos which encourages others – children and parents – to be interested.

Examples from practice

Space and resources. Space and resources need to be used in flexible ways. For example physical areas, wheeled toys, bricks and blocks are as useful in prompting stories as role-play props. Mixing resources from one area into another – by placing Playmobil figures in the sand or water tray, for example – can help children to create stories and move them on. Where space for role play is limited, simple bags of props can be used. These can be general – containing gloves, spectacles, shoes and bags – or they can be specific – a decorator's bag, for example, containing rollers, paint pots, overalls, wallpaper and big brushes.

Enjoyable opportunities for the children to tell stories, experience stories and re-tell them. Examples include having storyboards and puppets near the book corner; giving access to story-tapes; having a paired story-telling time for children where one tells the other a story with class feedback on those that children particularly like; having a list of stories that have been told by the children so that children can ask each other to tell them a particular story.

Time. Finding time is always difficult but having regular, short sessions for story telling is important. It enriches the play curriculum and can provide a springboard into other curricular areas such as writing.

Modelling. The children should hear adults telling stories from books and jointly created photo-books, as well as using puppets and storyboards. Adults need to strive to tell a range of stories, including stories about themselves, their home life and what they were like when young. Advice to parents should encourage them to tell, as well as read, their children stories about the children themselves, their families and things that happen in their own community. Inviting authors, both professional and other children, to visit and tell stories is worthwhile, as well as making good use of the models on radio and television.

An interest in the children's stories and an ethos which encourages others to be interested. Children pay attention to what adults do, not what they say. Adults have to show that they enjoy and appreciate the children's stories, not just tell the children this. This is done by listening to what the children say and do and by talking informally about children's stories with other children as well as by talking to parents about the stories that children create at home and at school.

Did you know?

The resources that are provided can nudge children to explore certain storylines or types of stories. Explicit props or settings (such as a crown or a well-equipped home corner, for example) prompt children to play out certain types of story. Research has shown that such props are a helpful tool through which educators can expand the range of stories, settings and characters that children experience.

Sometimes, however, props that are ambiguous and non-specific prompt more explicit and precise language. As children play out the story they must explain and describe the settings and characteristics. When creating a street and cars using plain blocks, for example, children describe and negotiate the specific features and locations – language that is simply not necessary when playing with actual representations of houses and cars. Boxes and drapes that can serve many purposes are thus as important as specific play props – children need both.

A.D. Pellegrini and L. Galda, 'The joint construction of stories', in Bruce K. Britton and A.D. Pellegrini (eds), 1990, *Narrative Thought and Narrative Language*, Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 113–130.

MOVING INTO WRITING

Once children see themselves as story creators and tellers, they need to know that there is a purpose to writing a story down. A written story can be:

- re-visited and re-lived by the author, alone and with others
- shared/told and enjoyed by different people at different times.

By encouraging children to write their stories so that they may be better celebrated, adults make literacy important and the writing process visible. Children learn that they too can be writers and that their written stories give satisfaction and delight.

Writing a story is different from telling it out loud. In speech, the speaker tends to know the listener and uses verbal and non-verbal cues to gauge how well the story is being understood. Gestures, interruptions, intonation, the tone of voice and accent are all used to help convey the meaning. Children have to learn that none of these aids is available to writers. In addition, children have to develop new concepts about how to convey meaning – through the use of punctuation, layout, presentation, capital and lower-case letters, illustration, etc.

Children have to learn all this while also mastering the skills of handwriting, and building their knowledge of spelling. This is not an easy task. However, it is more rewarding for both the children and the teacher if the acquisition of secretarial skills runs parallel to satisfying story experiences. When story writing is left until after the secretarial skills have been taught, children can easily disconnect them from the idea that writing is enjoyable and about giving delight through the stories they have to tell.

Teaching children to write stories

Children learn how to write stories when adults take time to teach them. The teaching can be with individuals, groups or classes. It can be done through various activities.

Modelling. This can be the adult writing a story to read to the children or 'thinking aloud' as she writes in front of a group of children or writing a shared story with the children. For example, the children had been on a visit to the supermarket. The adult decided to write a shared story with the children about a family of mice who live there and come out only when it is closed. She introduced toy mice and asked the children what the mice would do, writing up the story as it was suggested.

Scribing. The adult writes for a child who has a story to tell. As she writes she reflects what the child says and may ask questions to help the child realise what the reader needs to understand. She may also talk about the letters, words or layout, explaining what she is doing and why.

Questioning and explaining the options. During the writing process, the adult demonstrates the different options available to the writer. For example, she says 'You could explain about your giant in two ways. You could say ... or .... Which do you want?'

Responding to show what the reader needs to know. While the story is being written, the adult can say 'You've written... but I don't really understand what you mean.'

Celebrating. Adults need to read, and encourage others to read and show delight in, the stories children have written. They must ensure that they are used and that readers say what they like about them. Making the children's stories into books is **one** way to publish and celebrate them. It is vital that children watch others read the stories they have written. It gives literacy a high profile and helps develop a purpose and delight in writing.

From play into writing

It is not necessary for adults always to feel that they have to take time to set a special context for story writing. Once aware of the number of stories and where they happen in their establishment, educators can use these as a springboard for writing.

Examples from practice

Playing into writing. The children made a space station and told everyone what had happened in it. The adult suggested that they write and illustrate their space station story.

Drawing into writing. Alan was mad about dinosaurs and liked drawing them. As he drew, he told stories about which one was fierce, which one was looking for its baby and which ones just wanted a peaceful life. The adult scribed Alan's story to go alongside his drawing.

Starting with character. Karen put on long elegant gloves and a shiny tiara. 'I'm a princess but I like to catch robbers who are trying to steal my jewels.' The adult encouraged her to play and talk about her character and at together time asked all the children to help in writing a story about Karen's princess.

Starting with setting. The educators made a 'Dark Den' for children to play in. Torches and writing materials were provided for them to read and write spooky stories.

Starting with structure. The adult read a repetitive story such as *The Fish Who Could Wish* by John Bush and Korky Paul (Oxford University Press). The children worked with a friend to draw and write their own wishing stories.

Talking into writing. Real experiences can easily become imaginative. The children went on an outing to the seaside. They went to a shop and saw a toy hippo for the book area. They took it back and the adult made up a story about how he came to live there and what he thought of it.

Activities into writing. The children made fruit salad. They all tasted it and said what they liked and disliked about it. But then they talked about who else would like their salad, quickly introducing imaginary characters: what fruit salad would the wicked witch like to make? what about the very hungry caterpillar? ... and why?

Sue Ellis, Anne Hughes and Lynda Keith, 1996, *Scholastic Writing Workshop: Imaginative Writing, Key Stage 1: Story Projects*, Scholastic Ltd

Writing as a social and personal activity

As with play, children should be encouraged to write alone, with a partner and with groups. When children write individually, they are able to follow their own agenda to tell the story that they want to tell. They experience all aspects of the writing process and must rely on their own knowledge and skills. When writing with others they learn that writing can be a social as well as an individual activity. It can be supportive, helping children understand the task of a narrator as well as letting them pool their skills, knowledge and ideas. Children should find both writing alone and writing with others satisfying and enjoyable, but perhaps in different ways.

Children should have some say over what happens to the stories they produce; the stories could go into the book corner, go on a story wall, go home to parents, go in a place that is special to the child or be given as a gift. This further emphasises how stories and writing cement social relationships and ensures that literacy has a high profile.

Points to consider

- Is yours a story-rich environment? How would you find out? How could you further develop this?
- How do you know about the range of stories and the variety of ways that your children create stories?
- What could you do to use the stories that children play and tell as a springboard into writing?
- Do you use the full range of strategies to help children move into writing their stories down?
- Which children see story writing as an enjoyable and important activity? How can those that don't be encouraged towards this view?

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